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HONG KONG AND TAIWAN INFORMATION

This office has secured a limited number of copies of the 1957 Hong Kong Church Directory (published by the Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese), and of the Taiwan Christian Yearbook for 1956 (just published under the auspices of the Taiwan Missionary Fellowship, edited by Rev. Donald E. MacInnis). Those who wish to secure copies may do so by sending stamps in the amount of \$.40 for a copy of the Hong Kong Directory, and \$.15 for the Taiwan Yearbook (postage included). Please address inquiries to Mrs. B. D. Goode at Room 1116, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N.Y.

CHRISTIAN THEISM by K. H. Ting (continued)

The Reason for Unbelief

Other people are always analyzing us Christians, to explain why we believe in God, saying that we are looking for an opiate. I have already said what I want to on that subject, but now let us do some analyzing ourselves, and find why it is that from the beginning of the world there have been people who would not believe in God. There are two reasons, the first a general and universal one, the second one that applies particularly to this century.

Moral and spiritual reasons

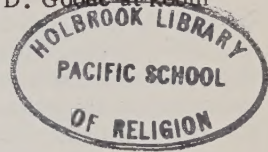
To believe in God or to believe that there are living beings on Mars may seem both to be acts of believing, but they are vastly different. To believe that there is life on Mars, if you believe it you believe it, and if you don't you don't; it makes no difference in your moral or spiritual life. It makes no demands upon you; whether you believe or do not believe, your life, your thinking, your actions will be the same.

Belief in God is a different thing: if you don't believe, that is all there is to it, but if you do believe, the consequences are great.

Adam sinned, and then when Jehovah drew near, he hid himself in the trees, because he did not dare to look upon the face of Jehovah. We can imagine how happy he would have been then, if there had not been within or without the universe any such thing as this Jehovah. And if he had remained hidden for a long time, would not he and his children have come to believe that Jehovah after all did not exist?

Peter knelt at Jesus' feet saying, "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man." (Luke 8:8) Since he knew Jesus to be Lord and himself to be a sinner, should he not instead have repented? Why would he ask Jesus to depart? Yes, we have all had this experience of both wanting the Lord and not wanting Him. The Lord is what we want, but yet He demands that we repent. If we are not willing to repent, if we are unwilling to pay the moral and spiritual price

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we can only ask this Lord to leave us, and even wish that He did not exist.

Belief in God sometimes becomes an opiate, that is true. But consider how often refusal to believe in God becomes an opiate. How many men there have been since the beginning of history who have drugged themselves by a denial of God's existence, so that they could continue in sin, avoid responsibility, and stifle the reproaches of their conscience. Sometimes we meet people like this within our churches. They are morally reprobate, but refuse to repent, and the result is that having departed from God they gradually come to deny His existence. The only way they can recover their faith is first to repent of their sin.

2. The Church's failure to manifest God

Another reason why the world refuses to believe in God is the failure, the darkness, the sin of the churches. The Lord Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." But we do not do this. From the life, the thinking and the work of Christians people are not able to see Christ's Father, full of love, justice and purity. What men can see in the Church is instead a God whom their own sense of morality and justice does not allow them to believe in. This is an important reason why people today do not believe in God.

Let us quote some Western writers on this subject.

A French Catholic writer Jacques Maritain, in his True Humanism, says, "What is the source of Communist atheism? It is that the Christian world was not true to its own principles, thus arousing the hostility of Communists, who then went on from hating the Christian world to hating Christianity itself."

Berdyaev, a Russian theologian who moved to Paris after the October revolution, in his book on The Rise of the Russian Revolution, writes as follows: "There are some Christians who condemn the Communists for their atheism and their anti-church activities. But we must not place the main responsibility for this upon the shoulders of the Communists. Christians themselves must bear the larger part of the blame. Christians should be not only condemners and judges, but also penitents. Had Christians in their social life tried hard to put their Christian principles into practice? We condemn the hatred and violence of the Communists. But had we avoided hatred and violence before? Had we put the principles of Christian brotherhood into practice? The sins of Christians and of the historical church have been very great, and they have brought a just punishment."

The Armenian Christian Tiran Nersoyan, in his book A Christian View of Communism, says: "Atheism was a necessary tool for the Communists to use in order to liberate the proletariat from the reactionary influence of the clergy.... Atheism was the most radical way of sweeping away the lack of fellowship between people of various religious sects."

We need not agree entirely with all the above quotations. But because of the sins of the church, and especially because the church in the field of politics was always on the side of the enemies of the people, the church lost its ability to show forth God. This point is one which we in the Chinese church can appreciate. Now the Three Self Patriotic Movement has called the whole church out of bondage to imperialism, which makes it a movement of great significance.

In their criticism of religion, people have fortunately centered their attention on some of the evil results of religion in personal and social life, such as its inhibiting influence on civilization, its harmful effect on health, its upholding of private property, its sapping of the unity and strength of the people in their class struggle, its perversion by enemies of the people, but have not touched upon the substance of our faith. Some of the things criticized are foreign, and now a thing of the past, while others are Chinese in origin, and are still a problem. These should rouse us to greater vigilance and self-examination, amending what is wrong and strengthening what is right.

Today we should enter fully into the Three Self Patriotic Movement, purifying and rectifying the church, lest it come under evil influences and suffer just rebuke from the world. Thus we shall make possible the conditions for witnessing to the substance of our faith - the truth of the Gospel.

Faith and Fellowship

Fellow-students, atheism has for a long time existed alongside the church; it is not something which the church has just met with in the last few years. We must not be alarmed, we should recognize the right of all shades of atheism and agnosticism to exist, we should become

accustomed to living with them, learn how to avoid being seduced by them, while at the same time profiting by their criticism of religion, and learn how to present the Gospel to people who have been influenced by these theories. Theism and atheism are matters of faith and of world view, not matters of government. But there are some Western theologians who are trying to use this question as an instrument in the cold war, and this we do not approve of. We know that neither cold war nor hot war will change an atheist into a theist. The Western church has published many books on the subject of Christianity and Communism, but they are not of much value to us, because their authors have been too much influenced by the anti-Soviet, anti-Communist spirit of their own governments, so that they speak not with the loving spirit of an apostle, but with the self-righteousness of the elder brother. We know that only as the church justifies itself and becomes really the church can the Gospel feel the liberating strength of its truth, and bring people to a knowledge of sin, repentance, and confession of Christ as Lord. To use the question of atheism and theism to foment civil disorder would do no good, but rather harm.

A nation or a government cannot be either theistic or atheistic. These are questions of faith, and faith is personal, it does not pertain to a nation or a government. Note that the principles for faith (hsin-liang) both have a 'man' character on the left hand side. That is because only an individual man can believe or not believe in God. Now a nation or a government is not a single individual, it can neither believe in God nor not believe in God. We Christians must think deeper, and not be unduly influenced when some one nation calls itself a Christian nation. We see that many of their government leaders assume the title of religious leader, appear to be very devout, but their purpose is really to advance their own fortunes and get support for their actions. They call their nation a Christian nation and their government a Christian government. But Christ has said that His kingdom is not of this world, how then shall a nation or government dare to call itself by the name of Christian? The true purpose of such a nation is simply to use the name of Christian to advance their own fortunes, to get glory in the eyes of the world, but the result is only to drag down the name of Christian until it is viewed with suspicion and even hated by the world. (See statement above by Maritain.) We know from history that those who make a pretence of religion can appear very devout. Even Herod who wanted to kill the Christchild in the manger pretended that he wanted to worship him. And we know well how Herod's successors have cleverly used religion to advance their wicked dreams of world imperialism. The Lord Jesus said, "Not all who call me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." This we must never forget. So we Christians must be wary, and not be taken in by any nation or government just because it assumes the name of Christian. The question we should ask is not whether a nation constantly uses the name of God, but whether its principles and policies are good, whether it really fulfils the responsibility that God demands of a nation. Only by weighing a nation by this rule can we avoid being deceived; only in this way can we judge factually and fairly. In regard to the political leadership of any nation, what we should ask is not, Who is the Leader? or What does he believe? but, What is the practical content of this leadership? Instead of asking about the religious faith of any leader, we should ask, Do we approve the constitutional principles of this government, and How do the ruling principles and the people join together to carry out those principles? The Communists are atheists. A difference in belief does not prevent political unity. We do not approve of their atheism, but we welcome the Communist political leadership, and we welcome their frank attitude regarding questions of belief. They tell the world openly what they think about religion, and so there is no question of their trying to use religion; everything is straightforward and open and clear, not like the so-called Christian countries, where religion is made use of by hypocrites, so that questions become confused and the issue of right and wrong not clear. Do you not agree with me?

Fellow-students, the establishment of the church in a socialist country is a task that was never accomplished in all the first 19 centuries of church history. In self-government, self-support and self-propagation we face a difficult responsibility. Why did the Lord give these responsibilities to us and not to some one else? Is it because we are better? No, the Lord has His own purpose, one which we cannot fathom. But at least we know, just because our Chinese church is weak and without antecedent prestige, that we can demonstrate how the church of the Lord in weakness shows forth strength, we can show the workings of God's might, and thus give glory to God. God has indeed chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame them that are wise, and the weak things to put to shame them that are strong. This shows that the strength comes from God, and not from ourselves.

The End.

A. P. FRIEDLAENDER

We have already reported the release of Mr. Friedlaender, a White Russian resident of Peking, from his six years' imprisonment. He was treasurer of Peking Union Church, and well known to the missionaries of that area. We now have a letter from him, in which he speaks of the tortures inflicted upon him by the Communists, "the result of which is a crack in my hip and a broken wrist, which healed without medical help, as such luxury is not accorded to captives in Red China."

He met many Chinese Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, while in prison, and praises highly their loyalty and sense of unity. They were there for "ideological remoulding" and their captors tried to break their spirit by persecution. They were denied the right to pray, or even to have a Bible, but they managed to carry on secretly. As for himself, he says, he would often "remind some weaker brethren about the life of our Saviour, His sufferings for us, and His ultimate glory. A Methodist Japanese war prisoner was dying from cancer, I was staying next to him and prayed together with him, easing his mind by kissing a cross made of two chop sticks tied together. I could do only this for him, not being very familiar with the rites of his denomination. Many times did I have opportunity to help my fellow-Christians; perhaps I didn't do it so well, but my heart was in it." He says that the Mohammedan religion is given more consideration because of diplomatic pressure from Pakistan and Egypt.

After his release he was able to visit the British Embassy chapel service on September 1, just prior to his deportation. "Owing to the absence of a minister, only Bible study and prayer took place. I met a few foreign friends there, but no Chinese. All keenly felt the dark hour of Christianity in China."

FORCED LABOR CAMPS

One of the criticisms of Communist policy often heard in the brief moment of "100 flowers" blossoming, was that the Communists were always doing things without constitutional or legal backing. The Communists took this criticism to heart in a grim way by preparing in August a decree on Labor Training, thus legalizing their crackdown on so-called rightist elements.

The only difference between these new camps and the older Corrective Labor Camps is that in the new camps the inmates are paid for their work. But the inmates are deprived of freedom of movement and kept under strict discipline.

The decree enumerated four categories of persons to be assigned to Labor Training Camps:

1. The jobless, vagabonds, those who habitually commit minor thefts or frauds, not amounting to criminal offences, or transgress police regulations.
2. Counter-revolutionaries and reactionaries against Socialism whose acts do not amount to criminal offenses, if they have been dismissed from their jobs and have no means of livelihood.
3. Those in government offices, social organizations, economic enterprises and schools, who refuse to work for a long period, or breach discipline or offend public order, if they have been dismissed and have no means of livelihood.
4. Those who habitually refuse labor distribution or transfer, do not accept direction in labor, complain without reason, or damage public works.

It will be seen that these categories are broad enough to include anyone the Communists look upon as troublesome.

A later report, December 5, from Taiyuan, Shansi, tells of 7,000 government workers setting off for the countryside, "as part of the movement to temper and remould intellectuals through work alongside peasants and factory workers." On their departure they were congratulated by the mayor "on being the first selected to help the country on the labor front." (This suggests that the penal nature of the measure is being camouflaged as a form of community service.)

SHANGHAI NEWS

Pastor Chia Yu-ming's books on the Bible have now progressed to Volume V, on the Major Prophets. A book on The Existence of God is having a wide sale. The staff of the China Bible House has taken a cut of 50% in their pay rather than close out the work.

There is an interesting note on the Australian Anglican visitors to China. The writer says "The Australian Bishops kept very closely to the Chinese Church, and of course they saw what they were shown."

The Endeavorer's Church continues to carry on a Sunday School for White Russian children with over 100 in regular attendance.